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ABSTRACT

Although research has suggested that level of social stress relates to psychosocial problems in adolescents and that social stressors impact more on females than on males, past studies have not considered whether gender differences in stress are related to perception of stressfulness or higher levels of experience, and if any types of events consistently distinguish gender differences. In this study the Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) was administered to 84 16- to 18-year-old males and females to test the relationship of ratings and experience of four types of social stressors (Developmental Transitions, Induced Transitions, Daily Hassles, and Circumscribed Events) to self-image. Differences found in the stressfulness ratings of the four stressors were relatively parallel for both genders, and no significant correlations between ratings and experiences were found. Only the Daily Hassles score correlated with the self-image scales for both genders. Comparisons of subjects with clinical range scores and those with normal range scores on the OSIQ indicated that for both genders, the two groups differed significantly only on the Daily Hassles score. The results suggest that gender differences are less influential than previously reported and that day-to-day stress is most influential in overall adjustment. A 23-item reference list and 3 tables are included. (KS)

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Types of Stress and Transitions and Adolescent Self Image

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Abstract

84 16-18 year old male and female volunteers were sampled to test the relationship of ratings and experience of four types of social stressors (Developmental Transitions, Induced Transitions, Daily Hassles, and Circumscribed Events) with scales of the Offer Self Image Questionnaire. Contrary to previous research we did not find correlations between ratings and experience and few gender differences in ratings. Although differences were found in the stressfulness ratings of each of the four types of social stressors, these differences were relatively parallel for both genders. Correlational analyses indicate that Daily Hassles score was the only type of stressor to correlate to self image scales for both genders. Comparisons of subjects with clinical range scores and those with normal range scores on the OSIQ indicate that for both genders, the two groups differ significantly on the Daily Hassles score only. These results suggest that gender differences are less influential than previously reported and that day-to-day stress is most influential on overall adjustment.

A large number of studies have demonstrated that level of social stress relates to subsequent psycho-social problems among adolescents (Coddington, 1972; Gersten, Langner, Eisenberg, & Simcha-Fagan, 1977: Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980). Recently there have been attempts to extend this approach beyond correlation of life stress scores to physical and psychological symptoms to a more general explanation of differences in overall adjustment and developmental progress (Ryff & Dunn, 1985). Concurrently, a great deal of research has focused on what type of life events and qualities of those events (e.g. negative versus positive experience) are salient in the effects on psycho-social adjustment observed (Compas, Davis, & Forsythe, 1985; Newcomb, Huba, & Bentler, 1981).

Among these studies three major concerns can be identified that are relevant to studies of adolescence. First, is the issue of orienting scoring to individual perceptions of stressfulness of events versus objective weighting (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Compas et al., 1985; Newcomb et al., 1981). Compas et al. and Newcomb et al. report a general consistency among adolescents in the valence assigned (positive and negative) life experiences, but considerable variability in extent of life change attributed to a given event. Newcomb et al. suggest that simple counts of events rather than weighting based on each adolescent's perceptions is adequate and psychometrically more sound.

Also, Newcomb et al. suggested counting only negative events in measuring social stress, although others report overall life change is a more useful metric (Gersten et al., 1977; Kale & Stenmark, 1983). These findings mirror results from studies of adults (Ross & Mirowsky; 1979). The present study examines to what extent individual perception relates to and distinguishes experience of social stressors to determine if personal perception merits consideration in scoring life events' impacts on adolescents. If there is either exceptional consensus or variation in the ratings of life events then weighting impact by personal ratings would not be meaningful, and is likely to confuse subject variance with effect (Swearingen & Cohen, 1985a).

The second concern is the types of events to consider and what dimensions to use to distinguish them (Felner, Farber, & Primavera, 1983; Newcomb et al., 1981). Various schemas have been suggested or used in the study of adolescence. Felner, et al. (1983) noted that there is a need to differentiate social stress that is related to relatively circumscribed or discrete traumatic events (e.g. auto accident) and "events" that are more accurately described as markers of life transition (e.g. parental divorce). Similarly, as adolescence is considered to be a time when life is "embedded in transition", it seems important to further distinguish transactions that are induced (e.g. parental divorce) from those that are developmentally expectable (e.g. puberty) when studying this age group (Moss, 1981). Another important

distinction is between the social stress related to transitions or traumatic events and that related to the day-to-day chronic stressful patterns of life. Newcomb, et al. (1981) and Swearingen and Cohen (1985b) report that among their samples, psychological difficulties are more related to social stress from daily "hassles" such as arguments over use of the family car and hairstyles than to circumscribed traumatic events.

Thus, four "types" of social stressors can be distinguished (daily hassles, circumscribed events, induced transitions, developmental changes). This study examines the relative perceived stressfulness of each, and then their impact on adolescent self image.

The third issue, which has been raised less frequently, but when considered has shown importance, is the effect of gender on life stress effects (Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984; Compas, et al., 1985). Gender differences in developmental tasks and developmental course during adolescence have been amply demonstrated (Conger & Peterson, 1984). It would follow then that gender differences in impact of social stress is likely. Previous research reports that females perceive events as more stressful than males (Compas et al., 1985; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984). Swearingen & Cohen (1985b) report that females reported more negative events than males. Newcomb et al. (1981) reported that the likelihood of experiencing several life events was affected by gender. For example, females reported events such as parental divorce and

finding a new group of friends, whereas males were more likely to report getting in trouble with the law and starting to make money on their own. This accumulating research suggests that social stressors impact more on females than males (Burk & Weir, 1978), although this matter is far from settled (Gove & Herb, 1974). These studies have not considered whether the gender differences in stress are related to perception of stressfulness or higher levels of experience, and if any types of events consistently distinguish gender differences. For example, one relevant question is whether or not the developmental transitions of adolescence are more difficult for females or males. The present study addresses these issues by including such a comparison as well as gender comparisons of perception, experience, and the relationship of perceptions and experience.

The focus here is on a "normal" sample to determine if the social stress model is useful for explaining normal as well as abnormal variations. Offer, Ostrov, and Howard (1982) have developed a self image questionnaire (the OSIQ) to measure general adjustment and variations in development. In addition, the OSIQ has shown ability to distinguish clinical populations. Therefore, overall adjustment can be studied as well as clinically significant variations in adjustment.

Method

Subjects

84 (49 females, 35 males) 16-18 year old adolescents solicited through their suburban high school were utilized as subjects. The sample was 83% white and primarily middle class, although all levels of socioeconomic status and a range of ethnic backgrounds were represented in the sample.

Instruments

Social Stress Measure. This is a 69 item measure developed by the senior author and derived through a review of several measures of social stress for adolescents (Coddington, 1972; Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980; McCubbin, Patterson, Bauman, & Harris, 1982). Items were categorized into the four scales described above by comparing the categorizations of three independent raters working from operational definitions developed by the senior author. Seventy percent of the items were categorized by agreement across all three raters. Two out of three raters agreed on the classification all but two items (97%). Items with less than unanimous agreement were categorized into the group that the two agreeing raters had assigned. These categorizations yielded a 9 item developmental transition scale, a 17 item induced transitions scale, a 28 item circumscribed events scale, and a 16 item daily hassles scale. Subjects were asked first to indicate whether or not the occurrence of each item's referred to event would be a positive or negative experience and if so, how much

change (on a scale of 1 to 5) each would require. Rating scores were calculated in terms of total change required. Then, in a separate administration, they were asked to indicate whether or not each item had happened to them in the last twelve months. Rating scores were recorded as the average score across the items on the scale.

Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ). This is a 130 item self descriptive questionnaire developed to measure the adjustment of teenagers (Offer, et al., 1982). The OSIQ contains eleven scales: Impulse Control, Emotional Tone, Body and Self-Image, Social Relationships, Morals, Vocational-Educational Goals, Sexual Attitudes, Family Relationships, Mastery of the External World, Psychopathology, and Superior Adjustment. The OSIQ has been used widely with normal adolescents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with various clinical groups and has shown validity as a measure of relative adjustment (see Offer et al., 1982; Offer, 1986). Although Offer et al. report gender differences on several of the OSIQ scales, all scores were converted to standardized scores based on the manual's norms to control for this effect. In addition, subjects were categorized into clinical and normal levels of adjustment following the manual's criteria of categorizing subjects with a Z score of at least one on three or more scales as clinical.

A demographic questionnaire was used to record gender, ethnic group, age, and parental education and occupation. Preliminary analyses indicate none of these variables

correlated significantly to self image or stress level scale scores.

Procedure

Subjects were solicited through social science classes in a suburban high school of a large Midwestern city. Of those solicited approximately 70% agreed to participate and received parental permission to do so. Subjects were administered the questionnaires for individual completion during class time.

Results

Gender Differences in Stress

Initial analyses were performed to determine if there were gender differences in ratings of stressors, experience of stressor types, and the relationship between experience and rating. The rates of endorsement of each item in the stress scale for males and females was tallied and are presented in Table 1. Chi-square analyses of the rates of endorsement of each item by gender revealed only one significant difference with more females reporting "got poor grades in school"; ($\underline{X}2$ (1,1) = 8.51, $\underline{p} < .01$).

Table 1 about here

To determine if males and females differed in their rating or experience of any of the four types of stressors, ANOVAs were performed. Of the eight ANOVAs, one was significant and another approached significance. Females

rated chronic Daily Hassles as more stressful than males (F (1, 82) = 4.92, $p < .05$). The comparison of experience of Daily Hassles approached significance (F (1, 82) = 3.77, $p < .06$), with the female mean higher (see Table 2 for means).

Table 2 about here

Next, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated for each gender between level of experience and stressfulness rating to determine if rating was influenced by experience. No significant correlations were found for either gender group, and therefore no gender comparisons were made.

ANOVAs were then performed within gender to determine if rating of stressfulness for each of the four stress scales differed in either gender. Significant differences were found for both genders (females- F (3, 45) = 43.83, $p < .001$), males- F (3, 32) = 34.96, $p < .001$)). Scheffe post-hoc comparisons of the means indicate that both genders rated Developmental Transitions as less stressful than the other three types of stressors. Also, males rated Circumscribed Events as more stressful than Daily Hassles. (See Table 2 for means).

Relationship of Stress Types and Self Image

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated between each of the eleven OSIQ scales and score on each of the four stress-type scales broken down by gender. Of the 88 correlations, only five were significant at the .01 level and

all included Daily Hassles score. For females, Daily Hassles correlated significantly with Impulse Control (r = -.35), Body and Self Image (r = -.36), Morals (r = -.50), and Family Relationships r = -.47). For males, the only significant correlation was between Family Relationships and Daily Hassles (r = -.43).

The final analysis was performed to compare the four stress scale scores of subjects scoring in the clinical range (three or more scales with a Z score more than one) with the normal range subjects, sorted by gender. The means for each group are presented in Table 3. ANOVAs of each gender indicate Daily Hassles scores of the clinical group were higher than the normal group for both genders (females-F (1, 47) = 5.42, p < .05), males- F (1, 34) = 4.35, p < .05)). None of the other ANOVAs in this analysis were significant.

Table 3 about here

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine three issues related to understanding the relationship of social stress to developmental functioning of adolescents: the importance of perception in impact, the relative importance of distinguishing types of stress, and the prominence of gender

differences. In each case our study supports, in part, what has been previously reported, but also reports new or different findings than previously reported.

The analyses comparing rates of experience indicate little difference between males and females for particular items. Comparison of ratings of the four types of stressors indicates women rate Daily Hassles as more stressful than males. There was no significant difference on any other comparisons between genders of stress ratings. Within each gender, differences in scale ratings were parallel, with both females and males rating Developmental Transitions as less stressful than the other three types. The only gender difference was that males rated circumscribed events as more stressful than daily hassles whereas females did not. However, as Table 3 indicates the means' rank order is the same for both genders. When experience levels were compared, the only indication of gender differences was a close to significant difference of females reporting more experience of daily hassles.

Thus, it appears that, at least for this sample, the most striking and consistent finding is that males and females are quite similar in their perception of stress and their experience of stress. The only notable distinction is that females report that the day-to-day conflicts with peers, family, and teachers, and worries such as school performance are more stressful for them. This may reflect greater levels

of experience as is hinted at by the experience comparison. However, many of the items on this scale refer to personal relationships and managing conflicts and change in these. The difference observed here may reflect a difference in the genders' orientation to day-to-day relationships with females placing more value on these (Gilligan, 1982), and hence, feeling more adjustment required to cope with day-to-day stressors. This latter explanation could also account for males reporting that traumatic events, which tend to be self oriented, as significantly more stressful than other types.

A clear distinction shown here is that expectable developmental transitions are seen as less stressful than others. This could be due to their predictability and perceived "controlability" (Dohrenwend & Martin, 1979; Swearingen & Cohen, 1985a) or it could be due to the positive nature of the change brought on by several of the events referred to by its items, such as starting to drive. This positive tone may have led to a rating as requiring less change. However, it may also be that adolescents are more aware of and prepared for developmental changes than for other types of life stress and therefore rate such changes as less stressful. Whichever explanation is borne out by further research, these results support the contention that, for most adolescents, developmental changes do not impose excessive or overwhelming stress (Offer, 1986; Rutter, Graham, Chadwick, & Yule, 1976). Adolescent "turmoil" is less a developmental phenomenon and more related to day-to-day problems.

When the correlations to the OSIQ scales were calculated, it was revealed that only Daily Hassles correlated significantly with any of the OSIQ scales. For females a high level of Daily Hassles correlated to lower levels of self control, comfort with their body, sense of duty, responsibility, and concern for others, and poor communication and relationship with their family. For males Daily Hassles was also the only significantly relating stress scale and it only correlated with Family Relationships. Thus, although family problems correlates to higher levels of day-to-day stressors for both males and females, females are affected more broadly. The emergent gender difference seems to be the extent and type of effect of Daily Hassles. This finding is congruent with Newcomb et al.'s (1981) and Swearingen and Cohen's (1985b) conclusion that daily hassles are most pertinent to understanding stress effects on adolescents, but differs in finding that Daily Hassles seems less specific for females than for males.

Also, Daily Hassles was the only scale that differentiated the "clinical" and "average" groups, and did so for both males and females. This suggest, in light of the pattern of correlations found above, that Daily Hassles may be distinctly useful compared to other types of social stress in distinguishing adolescent likely to be experiencing significant emotional problems.

In sum, social stress impact and perception differs little by gender. A social stress approach appears to be less useful for understanding variations in normal developmentand adjustment, but one type of stress, Daily Hassles is of some use. Apparently day-to-day "hassles" effect adolescent female's self image more broadly thamn males. Daily Hassles seems most useful, however, for distinguishing symptomological from "average" adolescents of either gender.

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Table 1.

Percentage of Subjects Endorsing Stress Items by Gender

Item	Percent Endorsing	
Developmental Transitions	Males	Females
1. Teenager began having sexual intercourse	27.0	16.3
2. Lost your virginity	16.2	18.4
3. You got your first job	24.3	16.3
4. Puberty started	0.0	0.0
5. Found a new group of friends	32.4	42.9
6. Started to drive	10.8	14.3
7. Made a new friend	78.4	71.4
8. Started high school	2.7	0.0
9. Started going steady	18.9	38.8
Induced Transitions		
10. Family member started a new business (farm, store etc.)	8.1	10.2
11. Parents separated or divorced	8.1	4.1
12. Parent remarried	2.7	0.0
13. Parents adopted a child	2.7	0.0
14. Transferred to a new school	5.4	4.1
15. Brother or sister moved away from home	13.5	18.4
16. Young adult family member entered college, vocational school or armed forces	16.2	14.3
17. Family moved to a new home	8.1	6.1
18. Birth of a brother or sister	0.0	0.0

Table 1 - continued

		Males	Females
19.	Family went on welfare	2.7	0.0
20.	Brother or sister died	0.0	0.0
21.	Parent died	0.0	0.0
22.	Family member became physically disabled or was found to have a long-term health problem (allergies, asthma, diabetes, etc.)	8.1	12.2
23.	Parent(s) have more responsibility to take care of grandparent(s)	13.5	20.4
24.	Increase of parent's time away from the family	29.7	26.5
25.	Had to leave home (kicked out)	0.0	2.0
26.	Placed in a special academic program	29.7	22.4
	Circumscribed Events		
27.	Parent quit or lost a job	18.9	14.3
28.	Family member was found to have a learning disorder or problem	8.1	4.1
29.	Family member was married	16.2	4.1
30.	A member started junior high school or high school	35.1	26.5
31.	Parent started school	5.4	2.0
32.	Parent(s) started or changed to a new job	18.9	22.4
33.	Unmarried family member became pregnant	0.0	2.0
34.	Family member had an abortion	0.0	2.0
35.	Damage to or loss of family property due to fire, burglary or other disaster	8.1	2.0
36.	Close family relative died	24.3	18.4
37.	Death of a close friend or family member	24.3	36.7

Table 1 - continued

38.	Family member or close family friend attempted or committed suicide	0.0	10.2
39.	Family member became seriously ill or injured (NOT hospitalized)	21.6	8.2
40.	Family member was hospitalized	29.7	28.6
41.	Grandparent(s) became seriously ill	32.4	16.3
42.	Family member ran away	2.7	2.0
43.	More financial debts due to credit cards or charges	10.8	16.3
44.	Child or teenage member was suspended from or dropped out of school	13.5	4.1
45.	Family member went to jail, juvenile detention, or was placed on court probation	13.5	6.1
46.	Family member was robbed or attacked (physically or sexually)	2.7	4.1
47.	Family pet died	18.9	6.1
48.	Lost alot of weight	16.2	16.3
49.	Gained alot of weight	13.5	26.5
50.	Received a special academic honor	54.1	61.2
51.	Got someone pregant or	0.0	2.0
52.	Got pregnant	0.0	2.0
53.	Lost a good friend	18.9	30.6
	Daily Hassles		
54.	Family member had emotional problems	13.5	24.5
55.	Increased family living expenses for medical care, food, clothing, energy costs (gasoline, heating)	27.0	34.7

Table 1 - continued

		Males	Females
56.	Child or teenage member resists doing things with family	29.7	51.0
57.	Increase in arguments between parents	16.2	36.7
58.	Children or teenagers started having more fights with each other	21.6	26.5
59.	Parent(s) and teenager(s) have increased arguments (hassles) over: use of car or hours to stay out	37.8	53.1
60.	Parent(s) and teenager(s) have increased arguments (hassles) over: choice of friends and/or social activities	24.3	36.7
61.	Parent(s) and teenager(s) have increased arguments (hassles) over: attendance at religious services	8.1	18.4
62.	Parent(s) and teenager(s) have increased arguments (hassles) over: personal appearance (clothes, hair, etc.)	27.0	30.6
63.	Increased arguments about getting jobs done at home	45.9	59.2
64.	Increased pressure for a member in school to get "good" grades or do well in sports or school activities	67.6	53.1
65.	Family member uses drugs (not given by doctor)	16.2	34.7
66.	Family member drinks too much alcohol	21.6	30.6
67.	Parent(s) and teenager(s) have increased arguments (hassles) over: use of cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs	18.9	24.5
68.	Got poor grades in school	2.7	26.5
69.	Got into trouble with a techer or principal at school	13.5	14.3

Table 3.

Anovas of Experience Levels on Four Stress Scales of Clinical vs. Normal Groups, by Gender

	Clinical		Average	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Life Events	5.40	3.51	4.05	3.78
Daily Hassles	6.24	7.36	3.52*	4.80*
Induced Transitions	1.70	1.70	1.53	1.36
Developmental Transitions	1.53	2.25	2.44	2.16

* $p < .05$ difference between clinical and average groups

Table 2

Mean ratings and number of stressors experienced by gender

	Males	Females	Gender Difference
Rating of Life Events	3.60	3.76	NS
Rating of Daily Hassles	3.12	3.42	$p < .05$
Rating of Induced Transitions	3.34	3.52	NS
Rating of Developmental Transistions	2.57	2.69	NS
Experienced Life Events	4.32	3.78	NS
Experienced Daily Hassles	4.00	5.60	$p = .06$
Experienced Induced Transitions	1.53	1.36	NS
Experienced Developmental Transitions	2.16	2.16	NS

NS = not significant